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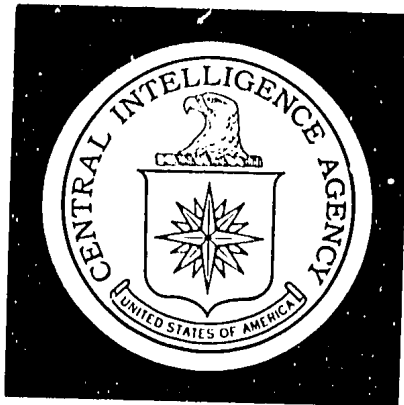
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WEEKLY SUMMARY
Special Report

Hanoi's Other Struggle: Building Up The Home Front

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HANOI'S OTHER STRUGGLE: BUILDING UP THE HOME FRONT

Hanoi is seeking to gain greater support from the home front—the “great rear”—for the battle in the South. Its efforts to improve the performance of the North Vietnamese people and economy, already hampered by problems of inefficiency at home and complicated by the death of Ho Chi Minh in September 1969, were challenged anew by events in Cambodia in 1970. These developments forced Hanoi's leaders to divert more of their country's manpower, as well as more of their own energy, away from domestic problems and back to the war, but this has not meant that the North Vietnamese are neglecting the home front. Their approach has been strikingly pragmatic and uncoercive; efficiency, improvement in managerial techniques, and even material incentives are being emphasized, even though party control remains a basic feature of North Vietnamese society.

Hanoi has taken this pragmatic course primarily because of the requirements of the war and the overriding need to get as much as possible out of the North Vietnamese populace over the long haul. Indeed, most of what Hanoi has been doing on the home front seems to be aimed at putting the regime in a position to support the war effort throughout Indochina for the foreseeable future.

Although Hanoi is still able to provide essential support for the war, its current policies have not conspicuously improved the North's performance. Nevertheless, the regime probably will continue to rock along much as it is doing now, mainly because shifting from the carrot to the stick would undermine popular willingness to undertake the long-term effort Hanoi now foresees.

1970: Another Year of Character-Building

Last year, like the two before it, was a hard one for North Vietnam. In 1968 and 1969, Hanoi had suffered severe military setbacks in South Vietnam and had shifted to a lower cost, longer range war strategy. It had made this shift partly to devote more attention to rebuilding the North and improving its performance as the “great rear area” for the battlefield to the south—a perform-

ance hampered by continuing problems of morale and inefficiency. In September 1969, in the midst of this effort, Ho Chi Minh had died, and his survivors had been confronted with the added task of maintaining the regime's cohesion in the absence of his towering personality. No sooner had they settled the immediate questions raised by Ho's passing and begun to dig into their domestic problems, than the spread of the war to Cambodia provided a new test of their resilience and flexibility.

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Events in Cambodia compelled the North Vietnamese to turn more of their attention and energy to the immediate problems of the war, and to ante up more manpower than they had planned. It did not force complete reorientation of their priorities, however. The evidence so far is quite convincing that even in the broadened war Hanoi is still applying the economy-of-force strictures that it began using in South Vietnam after the offensives of 1968 and early 1969. Concomitantly, it is continuing to do its best—still with decidedly mixed results—to tidy up the situation at home. To achieve as much as it can in the North without interfering with its direct war contributions, the Communist leadership has spent the last year cajoling, prodding, and urging its people—but not often coercing them—to greater and more conscientious effort. Its task has been more than usually difficult because the populace seems to have gone a bit slack psychologically in the years since the bombing stopped.

Hanoi's two long-standing goals—achieving the "liberation" of South Vietnam and "building socialism" in the North—remain very closely interrelated in Communist eyes. The North Vietnamese take seriously their role as custodians of the "great rear area," and clearly there is a consensus to keep the North as strong and viable as possible as the best means for Hanoi to support and attain its goal of ultimate victory in the war. Thus the continuing emphasis on programs and activities at home in no way indicates that Hanoi is wavering in its support of the war in the South. The North Vietnamese regime was sobered by the events of 1970 and now foresees an even longer struggle than before; it may be concerned over a drop in the dedication and effectiveness of the people; but the leadership's determination in the face of these challenges seems as strong as ever.

The Leadership: Le Duan Inter Pares

Because the North Vietnamese are intensely secretive with friend and foe alike, little is known about the workings of the inner circle in Hanoi. There were no formal changes in the Lao Dong



In Charge: Le Duan

(Communist) Party structure after Ho's death, and indeed Ho's position as chairman remains unfilled. There is now hardly any doubt, however,



Number Two: Truong Chinh

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that Le Duan, the party's first secretary, is the leading figure in the collective that has governed the country since Ho's death. Le Duan lacks Ho's mystique, and he does not receive nor seem to seek the hero-worship that he and his colleagues accorded Ho; but his pre-eminence is visible in many ways. It was he who wrote by far the most authoritative document to come out of North Vietnam since Ho died, a massive article on the whole range of Vietnamese Communist policy that was published last February and disseminated widely in North Vietnam. Moreover, the regime's domestic policies bear more of a resemblance to Le Duan's pragmatic, flexible approach than to the more dogmatically Marxist views that are often attributed to National Assembly chief Truong Chinh, who is presently the second-ranking man in the party hierarchy.

At the top of the Politburo pecking order with Le Duan and Truong Chinh are Premier Pham Van Dong and Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap. It is believed that in the past policy disputes have divided these leaders—particularly Le Duan and Truong Chinh—but the salient characteristic of the Hanoi leadership during the last year has been its unblemished appearance of unity. The Communists have an interest in projecting such an image, of course, but it is something they have not always been able to achieve in the party. Historically, Hanoi has given the "democratic" aspects of "democratic centralism" full play and from time to time debate has spilled over into published Vietnamese Communist writings. Throughout 1970, however, the overt literature was almost entirely devoid of controversy.

A more concrete sign that there is no unmanageable friction in the Hanoi collective was the smoothness of the transition after Ho's death. In fact, the so-called "new" leadership is simply the "old" leadership minus Ho. For a few months there was a period of uncertainty in which Le Duan was not heard from and Truong Chinh was particularly prominent. Once Le Duan reappeared, however, his authority was unquestioned. Not only did he face no open challenge, but there

has been no sign of a party shake-up that might have been expected if a serious behind-the-scenes struggle had taken place.

None of the evidence permits a confident appraisal of the depth or the durability of this apparent harmony. Hanoi's leaders must share a degree of real consensus developed during more than a generation of working together, but a good deal of animosity—animosity that could not be fully ventilated because of the need to present a united front to Hanoi's enemies—may also have been stored up over the years. As far as current policy is concerned the question is somewhat academic; dissension has been contained in the past when it was running stronger than it seems to be running now, and any disputes at present are almost certainly manageable. But over the longer term the leadership problem will bear watching, particularly if current trends in the war continue. The make-up of the ruling group has remained essentially the same for decades. Since 1960, when Truong Chinh was formally replaced by Le Duan as first secretary, there have not even been any changes in the ranking. Hanoi's rulers are only exceptionally durable, not immortal, and any backlog of dissension may start to surface when succession questions begin to loom larger.

Strengthening the North: The Problem of Motivation

Inefficiency at home has been a perennial problem to North Vietnam. Although this shortcoming has not seemed to impinge seriously on the prosecution of the war itself—probably because the sheer magnitude of a war effort tends to offset most organizational shortcomings—its existence continues to hamper efforts to improve performance on the home front. To complicate the regime's problems, since the end of the bombing the people at all levels seem to have decided that they could rest on their oars a bit. Worker productivity, which declined during the bombing, has not improved significantly since then. Profiteering and other forms of corruption within the administration have persisted, peasants have

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"I was born in the days when the co-op reaped its first five tons of autumn rice per hectare."

neglected their duties in the agricultural cooperatives to work their private plots of ground, and the black market has continued to flourish. To the regime's intense displeasure, Hanoi even has a few home-grown hippies.

By early 1970 the leadership had spent two years trying with no particular success to overcome these maladies. Along with the standard propaganda exhortations, and motivation campaign, it introduced some basic changes in domestic priorities. Development of heavy industries, for instance, which had received priority before the bombing, was downgraded in favor of agriculture and light industry, and the regime started trying to make more consumer goods available. Nothing seemed to do much to stimulate popular devotion to the cause, however. Then the safehaven and supply channel that Cambodia represented disappeared. It soon became apparent that Hanoi would have to start sending more men off to war than it had planned and that this drain would continue longer than it had hoped. Moreover, the prospect of an expanded and even longer war must have aggravated the morale problem at home just at the moment when solving that problem took on new urgency.

Essentially Hanoi's answer to its dilemma was to intensify the programs it had already introduced. As Le Duan had prescribed in his article of February 1970, North Vietnam's effectiveness was to be improved through the widespread use of technology, through improved administrative techniques, through decentralization, and even through the use of incentives. Farmers, for instance, have been guaranteed that for five years or more the state will take only a certain percentage of their crops, leaving them free to sell any surplus to the government or on the open market. Central direction of the society and economy was mellowed with pragmatism, and the heavy emphasis was on efficiency, not on Marxist orthodoxy.

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Wielding the Carrot

A good example of the regime's technique is a campaign still in progress to increase agricultural production. Articles promoting the campaign have been full of administrative *mea culpas*: the officials who supervise operations on the cooperatives have been self-seeking, party cadre have set poor examples, the system for distributing consumer goods to the peasants is inadequate to provide incentives for higher production. Almost totally lacking are condemnations either of the peasants themselves or of the highly unsocialist free market into which many agricultural goods are channeled. In fact, although the government has called for the eventual elimination of the free market, it apparently finds the market necessary, not just to provide incentives for increased agricultural production but as a supplement to official channels of distribution.

In dealing with the broader problem of general slackness in the populace, Hanoi has followed a similar line based on friendly persuasion. A press campaign urging respect for law and order—covering everything from petty pilfering and disrespect for one's elders to major crimes and large-scale malfeasance—was carried out intermittently through much of 1970. On the whole, its emphasis too was hortatory rather than punitive. And when legislation finally was written to back up the exhortations, it was aimed at cleaning up the system rather than at coercing the individual. Two decrees, one to protect "socialist property" and the other to protect "private property," were issued in late October. The first of these was aimed at those in and out of government who divert property belonging to the state (i.e., most of the goods, real estate, and money in the country) to their own benefit. The targets of the second were mainly officials who use their positions to fleece their fellow citizens. Wrongdoing under either decree carries stiff penalties, embezzlement can be a capital offense, for instance.

The government clearly regards the socialist property decree as the more important of the

two. It has already made highly publicized examples of several errant officials who were caught with their hands in the till. The decree on private property seems by comparison a sop to public opinion. Nevertheless, the two edicts taken together—but particularly the open decision by the regime to defend the sanctity of private property—further attest to the unorthodox methods by which Hanoi is trying to solve the problems it sees.

Whither Revisionism?

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The regime's current domestic policies have struck more than one orthodox observer from elsewhere in the Communist world as revisionist, excusable (if at all) only because a nation at war has special needs.

Some members of the regime almost certainly share these views. Although nobody in Hanoi seems to be arguing very hard at the moment for ideological purity, the long-term implications of the conflict between orthodoxy and revisionism still exist and could be important for the leadership and the party.

North Vietnam's domestic policies have been pragmatic since Hanoi intensified the war effort in the 1960s. The bombing that began in earnest in 1965 administered a particularly heavy blow to orthodox precepts of centralization and orderly planning; since then the ambitious five-year plan has been replaced by a series of one-year plans. Even after the bombing stopped, however, a practical outlook on domestic policies persisted. The present decentralized, uncoercive approach to the problem of revitalizing the North continues the trend.

The more orthodox members of Hanoi's leadership almost certainly are unhappy with the way things are going. Whether they eventually make a serious attempt to reverse the direction of events will depend largely on the extent of their support in the lower echelons of the party; this

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will depend in turn on the extent to which the party has absorbed the pragmatic habit of thought it has been exposed to for so many years. There is a chance, in other words, that by giving pragmatism in their domestic policies priority over ideology, Hanoi's present leaders may be laying the groundwork for long-lasting and substantial changes in North Vietnam's basic philosophy.

"Everything for the Front Line"

But for now, Hanoi's outlook is shaped mainly by the requirements of the war, and its policies are summed up in the slogan "everything for the front line." The idea that North Vietnam must be kept strong, stable, and in a position to provide the manpower to support the war is deeply entrenched in these policies, and what Hanoi is doing to improve the situation on the home front is aimed mainly at supporting the longer war the Communists now believe lies ahead.

In late 1968 and in 1969, when Hanoi thought it might obtain US concessions that could lead to a political settlement, there were some signs that the North Vietnamese were beginning to think about traditional postwar problems of reconstruction and development. There were strong suggestions that some of those looking down this road were pressing for an early return to economic orthodoxy, for further collectivization of agriculture, and for a harsher type of domestic discipline. Such indications have long since disappeared, along with any signs that the Vietnamese Communists anticipate an early end to the war.

The priority needs of the war are seen clearly in the accelerated military mobilization campaign that got under way not long after Sihanouk was overthrown. It is impossible to ascertain with any precision the number of North Vietnamese mobilized. It seems reasonably certain that more men entered the army last year than in 1969, but not as many as in 1968, when

WELCOME SPRING '71

by To Huu

Goethe: Man should act
Lenin: Man should know how to dream

'71 comes, serious, like a soldier
Setting out upon receiving orders, combat-ready,
His face beaming calmly,
Fresh and strong in his green, light uniform,
The Central Committee met, on a chilly day
A home-returned swallow from the opposite window looked this way;
The high command sat—grizzled hair, silky heads;
With Uncle still there, serene, looking down, mildly.
The plan was worked out,
The front shall step up attacks,
The rear shall give all-out support.
The Fatherland, entering spring, calls the paddy fields
Alive with the new five-ton strains
Which stand upright like young lads eager to achieve exploits,
How lovely they are, those plots of barren land,
Those waste hills gnawed by erosion!
At the party's words, they suddenly find themselves rich again.
The sap of youth rises, faces shine,
This land remains green even in winter.
The Yanks destroy, we build anew.
We fill up bomb-craters to install blast furnaces,
Our factories lean against the walls of deep, solid caves.
We lean on our own hearts, full of pride.
Our great life sees with the party's eyes,
Which, beyond each step now, show us vistas of longer dreams.
This spring Uncle no longer writes poems,
With the Central Committee's call burning hot in its heart,
Our nation as one man is marching, to the firing line.
We shall strike, strike thunder blows
To shatter the hawks' wings, and bash in their heads.
The Fatherland is rallying.
Fearless of a long-drawn fight, we shall grow up fast
To clear the Ho Chi Minh roads so it will illumine all posterity.
Surely Uncle will be glad
As each time we won a success,
He would laud us: "That's good."
Be worthy, O year '71!

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major offensives were under way in South Vietnam. Moreover, the call up of men into the regular army has been accompanied by a drive to expand and to improve the country's regional and militia troops—the forces that serve as a home guard. These steps seem to have returned North Vietnam rather closely to the conditions of the bombing years, when much of the population was organized along military lines to produce, to guard and maintain supply lines to the south, and to provide replacements for Communist forces in South Vietnam.

To drive home the point that "everything for the front line" is the current theme in Hanoi, the Communists convened a central committee meeting, probably in late January, to deliberate on the demands imposed by the broadened conflict. For the past several years these sessions were not publicized, but this one issued a closing communiqué and was also discussed in an editorial in the party daily. As is usual with such documents, the communiqué does not say much about the war, but its treatment of domestic issues leaves no doubt that Hanoi anticipates a long war and is going to call on the populace for greater sacri-

fices. The editorial makes the same point more explicitly.

The communiqué pays lip service to the longer term, orthodox socialist goals of developing heavy industry, further collectivizing agriculture, and generally building a more orthodox Marxist state. But it indicates that real pursuit of these objectives will be put off, as they have been in the past, because they are not compatible with an all-out effort to carry on the war.

Hanoi may be following its present course at home in part because some of its top leaders are inclined toward pragmatism and opposed to overreliance on rigid ideology. But the requirements of the war are the main factors in its choice. The regime does not want to rock its domestic boat by trying to carry out programs that might require considerable coercion of the population just at a time when it is asking for more sacrifices. Ideological purity simply is a luxury North Vietnam cannot afford; the most important task is to create among the people and in the economy the proper mood and conditions that are necessary to carry on the war.

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